

the young citizen begins to learn how the rights of free men are safeguarded by keeping the channels of free discussion open.

The school is a society. It resembles the larger community in the sense that it consists of people living within definite boundaries and using many services in common. Just as every community has an individuality which is the result

of its customs and institutions, so every school has a character which is the result of its traditions and ways of living as a group. Both the school and the community reach their highest level when there is a widespread awareness of the common interest and a high degree of cooperation among individuals and groups for the common good of the total community.



Experiences for Understanding

LOUISE C. McCUE

Keeping minds open as well as ears is suggested by Louise C. McCue, formerly assistant editor, EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, as a guide to developing better and much more thorough understanding in community relationships. Mrs. McCue underlines the significance of providing experiences for children which will lead to straight thinking in adulthood.

LARRY MASTERS *might* have understood Woody White. And Woody *might* have understood Larry. But they didn't. And least of all did either of them understand Henry Smith.

Larry owned and operated a lumber mill in Riverside. Woody was one of Larry's most faithful workers, or had been up until a week ago. Since then Larry wasn't so sure. Trouble was brewing among the lumber mill employees, and Larry had it pretty straight that Woody was one of the ringleaders. Woody had been heard talking to the men about new safety installations, even pointing out how they might have prevented the "accidental" death a few months back of one of their fellow-workers. The men were airing their views on wages and hours, too. Larry couldn't understand what was happening. He took the defensive when local reporters came to interview him, falling back on pat statements about "the value

of his lumber mill to the community" and "the need for individual initiative in our modern economy."

The reporters talked with Woody, too, and he took the defensive. He talked about what happens to a man and his family when sick leave is only two weeks a year and an injury sustained on the job keeps the man idle for two months. He talked about how hard it is to make a weekly wage cover the needs of a wife and three children. Grappling with personal problems of daily living hadn't left Woody much time to ponder the importance of Larry's lumber mill to Riverside or "the need for individual initiative in our modern economy."

Larry and Woody seemed to live in different worlds. That they could have understood each other was perhaps too much to hope. So far as could be determined they agreed on only one thing—their distaste for Henry Smith. Like

Woody, Henry was a hard worker, and, like Woody, he was employed at Larry's lumber mill. But Henry was several notches lower on the mill's social ladder. His was a menial job, taking mostly brawn and little brain. Henry was bright enough and certainly willing to learn, but Henry was a Negro. That set him apart.

Larry's attitude toward Henry was more detached than Woody's. Larry knew that Henry did his job well, and, in a manner befitting his station as owner and operator of the mill, he bestowed words of praise upon Henry, just as he did upon all his loyal workers. Never let it be said that Larry Masters drew the color line. Of course, Larry felt that Henry must be quite content in the job that he had. Henry had finished high school, had even gone one year to college, but, being a Negro, Henry wouldn't want to earn a living any way but by the sweat of his brow.

Larry didn't really understand Henry at all. He made no effort to know him as a person—he simply wasn't interested.

Woody, on the other hand, knew Henry pretty well. They got along all right on the job. Woody gave the orders, and Henry followed them. But Woody was afraid of Henry, afraid of loss of prestige if Henry got a promotion, afraid of the pressure of competition of a man as capable as Henry.

So there was no real understanding between Woody and Henry either.

Henry? Where did he stand? Mostly, he was confused. Woody seemed friendly enough on the job, and in a distant sort of way Larry was a generous employer. But Henry was no dullard and he could see that he was probably working up a blind alley. But

so far he hadn't been able to figure how to better himself. He wasn't given to violence; yet sometimes his patience was sorely tried.

It All Began a Long Time Ago

Twenty years ago Larry and Woody and Henry were just kids, growing up in the catch-as-catch-can environment of Riverside. Their common bond was fishing. Larry furnished the kind of fishing tackle that made a small boy's eyes sparkle; Woody had access to an unlimited supply of bait; and Henry knew exactly where the fish would bite. They pooled their possessions and knowledge, and never knew a fishing failure. What's more, the boys liked each other. They neither knew nor cared that they belonged to different groups in the social hierarchy of Riverside.

Their parents knew—and cared. The teachers knew, too, but they were too busy teaching important things like how to diagram a sentence and who was the tenth president of the United States to be very much concerned about life in Riverside.

In time the boys knew, too. The social groups in their town were something to be accepted. There was no thought of understanding them, of questioning their existence. In school they may have learned about the high and the low among peoples in other countries and other ages. They may have seen the injustices of the feudal system and the crippling effects of slavery. But no effort was made to study the social problems of Riverside. They were assumed not to exist.

Larry accepted the ideas of his parents that he was destined to order men

about—benevolently, of course. It was for the good of all that he, Larry Masters, be put in charge. Woody's parents had other ideas. They didn't regard the Masters as benevolent and they wanted no part of their patronizing helpfulness. This attitude they passed on to Woody. Henry's parents had learned a lot of things about Riverside through bitter experience. They hoped Henry's lot would be different. They tried to warn him of the heartaches he might encounter, and at the same time they tried to shield him from the community's harshest rebuffs. At first Henry didn't always understand the things he saw and felt. There were conflicts between his understanding of human decency and life around him. But gradually he learned.

These three boys went to school. There they might have gained a broader knowledge of their own community. They might have been given experiences which would show them that every group of people within a community is dependent upon members of other groups. They might have learned that management and labor are partners—not enemies; that the bettering of life for one man raises the standards of all men. These kinds of learnings would have helped Larry and Woody and Henry to work together twenty years later. There would have existed an understanding upon which friendly agreements could have been based.

Straight Thinking Can Help

Youngsters have so little chance to see a community beyond the narrow confines of their own backyard. Unless a broader view is opened to them, they quite naturally grow up feeling that

their way of thinking and doing is the right way, if not the only way. It never occurs to them that many people think and act differently and that maybe the other people have ideas just as good or better than their own. The schools need to face squarely their responsibility in opening boys' and girls' eyes to what goes on around them. It is much *safer* to discuss current conflicts in Asia than to talk about the race riot last week on Seventh Avenue. Yet a child's comprehension of strife abroad is of very limited value if he cannot see the troubled situations in his own neighborhood.

There are many ways to help young people arrive at better balanced attitudes toward the problems of our life. They need to see for themselves the whole community of which they are a part—they need to see it with understanding, the grimy surfaces along with the polished edifices. They need to study the industries which have taken root in their community—to understand what they mean to the community as a whole and to the individual worker. It is important that they take pride in the accomplishments of their community, but not to the extent that they become complacent about its shortcomings.

The public school brings together children from every group. This is one of its great virtues, but, unfortunately, a virtue whose usefulness is sometimes ignored. Let all the youngsters talk about all the problems. Each will bring to the discussion the views—and the prejudices—of his own group, but the mixture will temper itself, and the emerging attitudes will be the outcome of cooperative thinking.

When their community plans a new park, the children need to discuss the

value of such an enterprise to the community. They need to consider whether its location will make the park available to those who need it most, whether plans for its development will make it an area to be used—or a showplace to be admired at a distance. They need to consider the new park from the viewpoint of all the citizens.

All the youngsters need to know that every child in the community does not live in a big house like Larry's, that some of them don't even have a modest home like Woody's. They need to understand that these differences may not necessarily be due to shiftlessness on the part of one group of citizens. They need to be awakened to the social and economic pressures that sometimes seem to make a farce of our Bill of Rights.

It is not always easy for teachers to

understand what goes on around them. They may turn to the daily papers, and so may the youngsters; yet they must learn to analyze what they read, to weigh one editor's viewpoint against another. They must be careful not to fall under the spell of any one group of citizens, but always to keep an open mind and hear all sides. They must teach boys and girls to develop similar powers of discernment. Together they and the youngsters may talk over what goes on in their community, all benefiting from the ideas presented by a Larry, a Woody, and a Henry. An understanding based on a grasp of community problems can help these students to make intelligent analyses of state, national, and international matters. It can help them to *want* to understand. That, perhaps, is most important of all.

Let's Look Behind the Armchair

WALTER K. BEGGS

Some methods of studying the needs of the community and trying to fulfill these needs are weighed here by Walter K. Beggs, associate professor, Teachers College, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, who also asks some pertinent questions concerning the maintenance of a culture worthy of its future participants.

THE CURRENT preoccupation of American educators with meeting community needs may produce results that are synthetic or real depending upon how deep we are prepared "to dig." The point holds regardless of the fact that meeting needs is certainly the province and responsibility of teaching and educating. But stating a responsibility or recognizing it in theory is quite apart from discharging it adequately.

Curriculum bulletins and professional

publications of the present day are filled with suggestions for approaching curriculum study through a survey of community needs. At first glance such statements appear innocent enough and by any standard should be one of the steps involved in curriculum revision. But what then? What is implied by a community survey? Does it mean "digging out" the unique experience pattern of a given social and economic unit of American culture in order to see the reflection of the pattern in the

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